

March 19, 2007

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, my name is Doug Walsh, Superintendent of the Ennis School. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you in regards to HB744. It seems that this type of bill or concern continues to show up on an annual basis, and we would like to be able to offer this solution to this issue. As stated in our testimony on SB291, our concern is the possible erosion of our school tax base that will spill over and harm our neighboring school districts of Alder, Harrison, Sheridan and Twin Bridges. County-wide assessments are made to the transportation and retirement levies in all counties. If our taxable is decreased, it could require all Madison County districts to raise these levies as the overall county-wide school levies would decrease in value, causing a tax increase. So you can see that any loss of territory would have an immediate and damaging effect on all of our schools, but especially the Ennis District. Loss of taxable, as you are all aware, causes taxes to increase in all areas and will increase taxes or reduce services that a school district can offer.

Just for information sake, if our district were to lose 14% of taxable, as we think Bozeman will be losing by allowing this territory transfer, it would be a loss of taxable of 3,167,347.82 to our school district or \$3,167.35/mil. This would ripple throughout the county wide mills, and if we were to keep our budgets as they are today, it would cause a loss of \$292,061.34 in revenue. This is something that our taxpayers and our district would have to raise through increased taxation, if allowed by current school budgeting practices. So you can see that any territory transfer would devastate this district and certainly harm the other schools in the county. This would be ongoing into the future as this taxable would be gone forever and have an effect on the 963, K-12 students in Madison County. With that said, I can not tell you how important this bill is to the Ennis School District and to the other schools of Madison County. Accordingly, we urge the passage of HB 744.

FYI: It looks like we are presently paying individual transportation and tuition for eleven students: eight to Ophir and three to Bozeman. These districts also receive the ANB funding for these students.

The Ennis School Board is well aware of the concerns of busing students to and from school as we have students who ride at least 136 miles on two of our bus routes. The Ennis School Board and the Board of any newly formed K-12 school are the two entities who know what is best for students in both of these districts, as we deal with these and other issues on a daily basis. We also feel that this legislation will assure both entities a workable solution to any issues that may arise in future years.

The Chairman of the Ophir School has written the Ennis School a letter (letter attached) indicating that they are not interested in territory transfer from the Ennis School. This is a nice gesture and one that we appreciate, but it does not assure the Ennis District that a newly formed K-12 Big Sky School would honor this request as the board for the newly formed school district could be different from the present Ophir School Board. With the passage of HB 744 the Ennis School and Madison County will support the formation of a K-12 district in this area. We hope you can see that we are understandably anxious about this issue and hope to work this issue out for the betterment of the children and grandchildren of all areas concerned.

We will not oppose the formation of this K-12 school district, as it looks as if Bozeman and Ophir are in favor of this school district, if we are allowed to assist in protecting all concerned in this matter. What we are attempting to do is to protect this new school district and the Ennis School from any territory transfer in this area from either side. This legislation could assist others around the state who might be in or end up in this type of a predicament. This is not only a school issue, but because of funding issues, it becomes a county- wide issue in regards to funding some very basic issues, namely transportation and retirement. SB291 was presented earlier, and the lobbyists for the Big Sky wanted to collaborate with us to assure smooth sailing of this legislation. Since this hearing we have not been included in any manner whatsoever with SB291. We are hoping that HB 744 will assist in a smooth transition into law and will help not only the schools involved but for future stability in these matters throughout this great state of ours.



Ophir School District #72
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January 22, 2007

Ennis School District #52 Board of Trustees
PO Box 517
Ennis, MT 59729

Members of the Board,

We understand there has been some concern on the part of the Ennis School District's administration that the Ophir School Board has plans to annex portions of the Ennis District. Apparently this is in relation to current activities in Big Sky to establish a high school.

In clarification:

1. The Ophir School Board (K-8) is not involved in the effort of a group of parents in Big Sky to establish a high school district here. Our responsibility is to assure quality education for kindergarten through eighth grade.

We do, however, support the idea that Big Sky citizens should have the right to vote on whether a high school district should be established.

2. Expanding District #72 is not, and has not been, an issue for the Ophir School Board. We have not planned or discussed any idea for annexation. The issue has never been brought forward for discussion by members of the Board or by residents of our district or of yours. The Ophir School Board has no plans to discuss or take action to annex additional territory.

The Friends of Big Sky Education (FOBSE) – the group currently seeking an exception to the moratorium on establishing new high school districts – has been very open and public about their rationale.

Parents of high school aged children in Big Sky currently have three options for secondary education. Children can be sent on a daily eighty-mile round trip commute over Highway 191 to Bozeman. If parents have the means they can split up their family for four years. Or they can sell their home and move out of Big Sky. Most don't like any of the options.

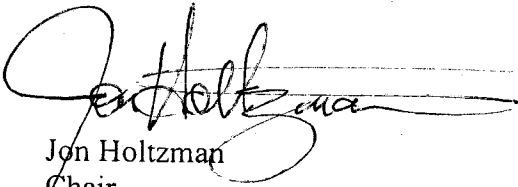
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FOBSE's stated preference is for a locally controlled high school in Big Sky, exactly what you have in Ennis. If that doesn't happen Bozeman's School Board has committed to establishing a satellite facility in Big Sky within five years.

We are in the midst of doubling the size of our facility to meet a rapidly expanding K-8 student population, which has also almost doubled in size during my six years on the Board. We are also trying to understand and anticipate the potential impact of either high school scenario on our district.

We hope this allays any concern you have about our intentions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Jon Holtzman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jon Holtzman
Chair

Ophir School Board, District # 72

For the Board: Krista Boersma, Jill Bough, Ben Bulis, and Nettie Quackenbush